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ABSTRACT

A review of recent literature suggests excessive drinking by parents has a negative impact on the behaviors of the child. The families in First Nations communities in Canada have suffered considerably because of alcohol and the pressures of the surrounding non-native community; valuable teachings of the Elders have come under attack and the loss of these teachings has left communities in turmoil; the role of the parent has been taken over by a loosely connected extended family, which can result in children feeling unwanted and unloved by the natural parent. Alcohol leaves many First Nation communities in a state of oppression as the young people soak up the behaviors being modeled by parents, teachers, relatives, friends, elders and leaders. This paper presents a study that examined the intergenerational impact of alcohol on First Nations children. Interviews with substance abuse counselors and/or elders from the community guided the process of data collection. Seven stories from participants and two from counselors are reported and related to the questions: "How does the intergenerational impact of alcohol affect children today?" and "What can we do about it?" Five issues are reported on: (1) "Learned Behaviors Not Our Own"; (2) "Focus of Concern" (the psychological gaps in one's life due to inconsistent parenting, violence and destructiveness within the family); (3) "Is Leaving the Answer?"; (4) "Healing within: Spiritual Help"; and (5) "Loneliness and Healing." Five recommendations for recovery and healing are presented. Appendices include letters and interview protocols. (EMK)

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ED 418 336

Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol on Children: A Native Perspective

Research Project
in partial fulfillment of the Master's program
Guidance & Counseling

Kandy McCorrister

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Brandon, Manitoba

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Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol on Children:

A Native Perspective

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A thesis/project submitted to the Senate of Brandon University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Senate for acceptance, a Master's Thesis/Project entitled:

Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol on Children:
A Native Perspective

submitted by Kandy McCorrister

in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Date Oct. 9, 1997

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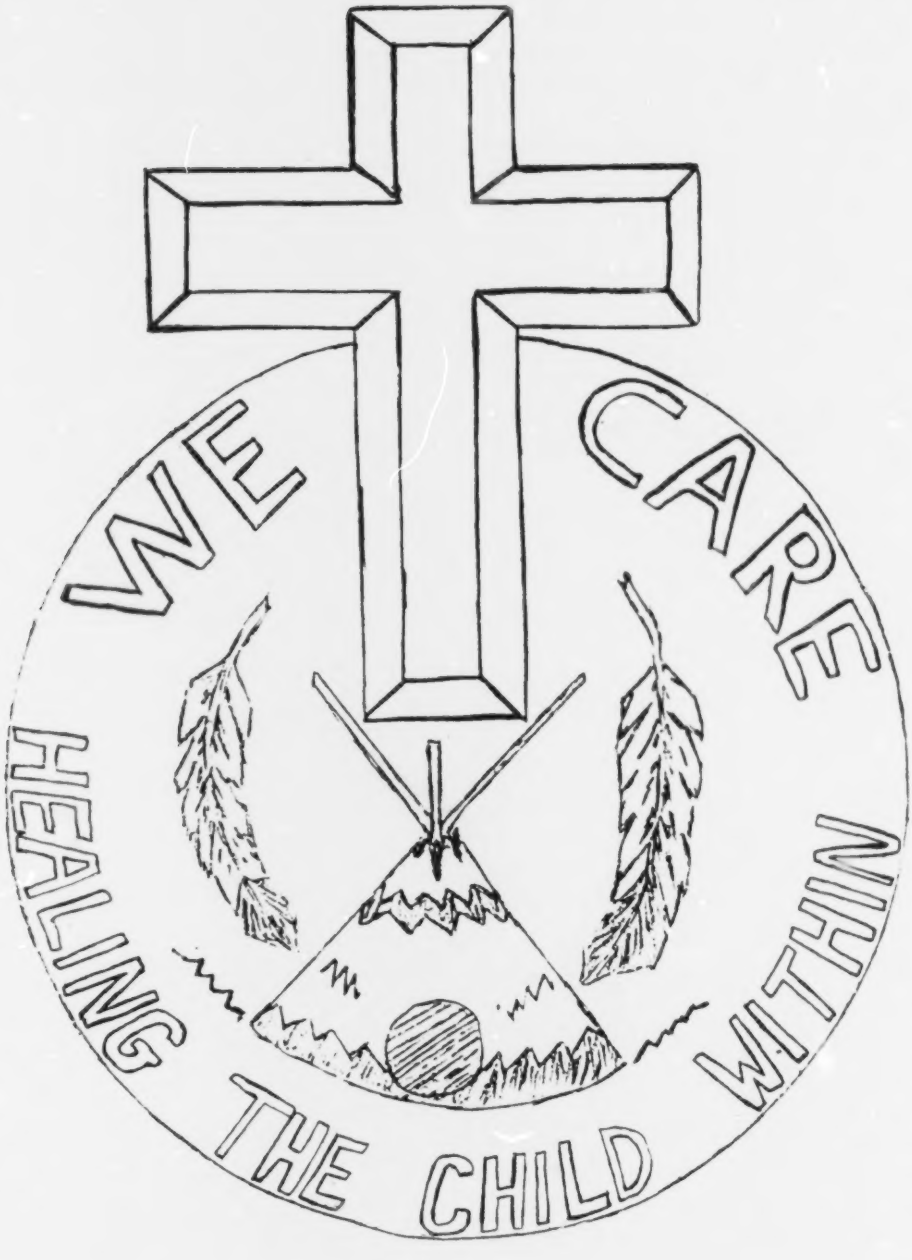
Abstract

From a review of recent literature, support strongly suggests that excessive drinking by parents has a negative impact on the behaviors of the child. Children learn so much from the parents and therefore many of the behaviors displayed by the child can also be seen in them. Children of alcoholic families go through life facing many uncertainties. They are deprived of love and other basics needs, which leaves them feeling insecure. Life for the alcoholic child is a lonely one and many times they keep silent about many things that happen to them. Children grow up quickly and learn to defend themselves and their younger siblings. They fail to face their own feelings and they tend to internalize everything, blaming themselves for the destruction or negativity in their lives. The families in First Nations communities have suffered considerably because of alcohol and the pressures of the surrounding non-native community; valuable teachings of the Elders have come under attack and the loss of these teaching has left communities in turmoil; the role of the parent has been taken over by a loosely connected extended family, which can result in children feeling unwanted and unloved by the natural parent. Alcohol leaves many First Nation communities in a state of oppression as the young people soak up the behaviors being modeled by parents, teachers, relatives, friends, elders and leaders. Many communities live a double standard when it comes to alcohol, therefore leaving the child in a state of confusion. Mistrust and silence are barriers created to deal with one's feelings. Understanding the intergenerational impact of alcohol on the Native Child is an important issue which needs to be addressed more fully so that effective programs can be created to help the child.

This study has shown that the behavioral pattern from one generation to the next is intergenerational. The child learns the behaviors that are modeled in the family and community. When the child constantly sees his or her parents turning to alcohol as an escape from everyday problems, then the child soon learns to develop those kinds of behaviors. It is important for one to realize that behaviors can be changed and one need not go through life feeling like a loser. Change can happen, but it means digging deep into the hearts and souls of your being, being honest with yourself and wanting that change to take place. This study brings to light the fact that our behaviors may not be just our own, they could be learned behaviors passed unto us from previous generations. Behaviors become our own only when we break the cycle and begin to make independent decisions about how we want to live our lives. When this process takes place healing comes and we begin to see the common elements of alcoholism in our lives and in those closest to us. This study shows the common elements of alcoholism suffered by each participant. Sometimes we think we are the only ones going through this crisis, but if we look to each other we can see the similarities in each of our life styles.



Ernest Stanyon - 1997

The Child Within

The child within this circle of life
cries out, WHY?
Why God have you created me?
I am so lost
I am alone
As though You were not there.

I bear my very soul
asking You to make me whole;
I examine my own heart
sift through every part
BUT STILL
I am so lost
I am alone
This child within this circle of life.

Who am I? I wonder at times
As I listen to my heart's broken chimes;
Shattered! Shattered from the phony life
this world has offered me.
Will I ever grow to be sensitive and strong?
I am so lost
I am alone
The child within this circle of life.

I am tired, I am afraid
to stop playing my pretending game.
If I reveal what's in my soul
Could You stop and make me whole?
BUT, please I do not want to be fooled this day,
FOR
I am so lost
I am alone
The child within this circle of life.

I hear Your laughter
I see Your tears;
WHY then, is it so hard to hold out a hand
To gently lead and guide me
through this discouraging land.
I am so lost
I am alone
The child within this circle of life.

It's only you
who can bring me to life.
Being gentle, being kind, being encouraging
Understanding why I am the way I am.
I ask nothing else, for I will cry BECAUSE
I feel so lost
I feel alone
The child within this circle of life.

My heart begins to mend and heal
very slowly at first,
only to be sure
I am able to feel
Your power to touch and make me real.
I was so lost
I was alone
A broken child within this circle of life.

Author: Kandy McCorrister

Introduction

From the time I can remember, alcohol was a commonly used substance in my community. Everywhere I went, alcohol was the main source of entertainment. Alcohol has brought much devastation, humiliation, shame and degradation to the First Nations People. Although alcohol was prominent in the community, it is important to mention that it not only devastated the First Nations people, but it had similar effects to the Metis and the non-status members of the community as well. However this study focuses on First Nations People and will refer to those people who are registered Indians living on Indian Reservations. Indian Reservations are defined as small pieces of land allotted by the Federal Government for groups of First Nations People to live on as defined in the Indian Act. Substance abuse, referred to in this particular study, deals only with alcohol and its impact on the First Nations Family.

Adults within the child's life are faced with the responsibility of guiding young people. First Nations Youth must make choices and decisions that constantly change because of changes in society. Drug and alcohol abuse is a complex problem that often originates in previous generations. Within this complex world, children become and have been victims of many things in life, often involving incest and child abuse. Some children come from economically deprived families, while others suffer various kinds of learning disabilities. Still others become involved in crimes that range from petty theft to violent criminal activities against others inside and outside the community. Some First Nations Youths suffer serious despair and depression that often leads to suicide. In Canada, First Nations suicide, the ultimate dysfunction, is over 5 times the national average.

I personally believe we all, as First Nations People, face painful memories of alcohol at some point in our lives, through our mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends. Even those who have never touched alcohol are affected in many ways. Alcoholism is a disease which affects and destroys our inner spirit. It alters the way one thinks, feels, and behaves. It is often used as a means of facing reality when life pressures are very great. However, alcohol not only affects the person who consumes, but affects all those whom he or she is in contact with.

The history of alcoholism in First Nations communities began with the social system brought in by the early settlers. First Nations People had no history of alcohol consumption much less over-indulgence and addiction. The Royal Commissions Report (1996) states that alcohol has affected First Nations People for many generations. The same report indicates, "Stereotypes of drunkenness among Aboriginal [First Nations] people have been greatly exaggerated, but there can be no doubt that the problem of abuse was - and is - real." (p.157). Alcoholism affects millions of people, and in our world, holds and carries the stigma of despair, disgrace, and dishonor.

Studies by Jaynes & Ruggs (1988); Topper (1981); Volk, Edwards, Lewis, & Sprenkle (1989); Woititz (1983), have found that children tend to turn to alcohol as an escape, especially when this behavior is modeled by one or both parents in the family system. Children do what they see their parents do. First Nations Children see this type of role modeling in every aspect of their lives, from parents, grandparents, teachers, and community leaders. Is it any wonder they believe this activity is the way to alleviate their problems? Our First Nations Youth lack positive self-identity which, I believe, is carried over from

parents who also lack positive life goals. Young people lack a clear sense of belonging, not knowing how or where they fit into the realms of the family system, community, and into the rest of society. Today there is a high degree of frustration experienced by elders, leaders, educators, and parents as they try in desperation to find solutions to this ongoing problem. Too often we are forced to sit by and watch our young people fall into the strong, gripping fangs of alcoholism.

First Nations Children live in two worlds. The inner communities to which they belong, and the outer community of the non-native population. The communities to which they belong try steadfastly to fight the ever increasing economic and social conflicts of society with the little resources they have, yet often fail to meet the needs of the child. The outer community, often neither wants nor accepts First Nations People as they are. First Nations People are frequently given negative labels such as, lazy, bums, drunks, etc.. With such labels how is it possible for First Nations Youth to overcome the negativity and secure a sense of belonging in this society?

First Nations Youths get caught up in alcohol as they try in desperation to live by the standards emphasized by society. The fast pace and forever-changing technology has drastically altered the lifestyles and ways of the First Nations families. Living conditions on most Indian Reservations are deplorable and many times the people give up and turn to alcohol as a way out. One can only wonder why communities fail to recognize that the loss of one's cultural values is a primary factor in the drinking behaviors of the First Nations Person? Values once taught through stories are no longer part of our daily lives because other things such as alcohol has taken over. Much has been taken from the

First Nations People and try as they might, they are unable to live by the standards the non-native society has placed upon them. The whole family structuring system has gone from cohesiveness to destructiveness. Parenting skills, as noted by Grant (1996), were greatly damaged when the children were taken away and placed in residential schools. Languages were lost and barriers were put up as children were taught that their parents were unworthy parents. This resulted in a lack of communication between parent and child.

Along with the problem of alcoholism comes the violence and self-destructive behaviors among the First Nations Youths. Instability within family units filters down from one generation to the next. The impact of alcoholism on each generation has profound effects on not only the behavioral patterns and academic performances of children, but also on family structures, family interactions and family life cycles; but these are only some of the issues faced by First Nations People as they try to teach their young. What are the factors leading to such behaviors? Are these behaviors the result of intergenerational alcohol abuse? How can Native communities help young people cope with feelings of helplessness and worthlessness?

These are major questions I would like to find answers to as I conduct this study. Alcoholism is a nation wide problem, it knows no boundaries, and its destructiveness is prevalent within First Nations communities across Canada. It is my desire as a First Nations person, to reach out to the young people in hopes of helping them gain a sense of rebirth in their troubled lives. Healing does not come easily, but when it does it lifts the weight of the world from the shoulders of the one carrying it. I know for I have carried this burden for many years and now I am carrying new responsibilities for my children and

grandchildren. Mable Cuffee (1993-94), a Native American mother, speaks these words from her heart as she tries to reach the young people of our Nations;

> Respect from your heart what has been given to us from the Creator and we will live forever. Be aware of our surroundings and . . . of who we are, and where we are going in the future. . . . remember, it is good to look, feel, listen and understand with your heart rather than your mind.... **Sometimes.** (Cuffee, 1993; p.19).

This message means much, but is lost to many of the young people. Respect from the heart the good things which surround you, is part of the advice given from the elders; but how do we heed this simple advice when most of us live broken lives due to alcohol and other abuses within society? It is not easy being a First Nations Child, for many are broken spiritually and feel nothing but defeat in their lives. The First Nations Child may find it difficult to remember their oneness with others and the universe when his or her own life has been marred by the effects of alcohol. As alcohol consistently takes control of the family unit, the child will find other means of coping and surviving, thereby stifling the Child Within, as referred to by Whitfield (1989) as, " that part of each of us which is ultimately alive, energetic, creative, and fulfilled; it is our Real Self - who we truly are" (p. 1). Children who are not given opportunity to express their feelings or are constantly denied nurturing, live their lives with a false perspective of who they really are. These children take on a victim role and live their lives accordingly. They often find it difficult to resolve daily mishaps and traumas. A study by Woodside, (1986), indicates that;

> One of every eight Americans comes from an alcoholic home and 7 million of these are youngsters facing the daily fear, uncertainty, and problems that result from their parents' alcohol abuse. . . . 21 million children of alcoholics . . . have reached adulthood, many continue to suffer the long-lasting mental, emotional, and physical consequences caused by life with an alcoholic parent . . . (p. 448).

The Royal Commission Report (1996) states, "addictions are part of a circle of oppression, despair, violence and self-destructive behaviors that must be addressed as a whole" (p. 163).

By gathering personal stories from community members and interviewing effective alcohol counselors and / or elders I want to gain a better understanding of how alcohol affects the child within each of us. I believe the first step is listening to and accepting ideas and suggestions from young people. Thus support services can be provided with the child being the focal point. To begin healing the inner child, one must look at a holistic model approach, for each individual carries within themselves that which is spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, and intellectual. There are many hidden factors rooted in alcoholism and until communities begin dealing with the roots of the problem there will always be the unbroken cycle of alcohol abuse.

Most programs dealing with alcohol fail to help the child, therefore the alcohol carries over into the next generation. I have seen this behavioral tendency of children in various communities across the province. Programs are geared for those who are eighteen and up, therefore the younger generation has no outlet for problems occurring from alcohol. As stated by Cork (1986), "At all levels of research and treatment, . . . children have been grossly neglected"

(p.19). Most programs are set up for adults which leave the children to cope and fend for themselves. I believe this process of help must change to include children if we are to see healing begin in future generations. Children must be helped at an early enough age in order to put a stop to the intergenerational impact of alcohol on the next generation and only then may we begin to see attitudes change for the better. I have a profound desire to help others achieve a strong sense of security and a higher understanding of who they are. I will do this through expanding my understanding of the impact that alcohol has on future generations. How can we as parents, educators, and leaders work together to help young people overcome the helplessness they feel?

Literature Search

William Glasser (1984) delineates belonging as one of our basic psychological needs. Others (Kohut, 1984: Maslow, 1962) support this premise and both Glasser and Maslow state that if the belonging needs go unsatisfied, other or higher needs will be thwarted. Such unmet needs will drive behaviors (Harver and Retter, 1995) which may prevent or delay a person's success in meeting other needs. As Ackerman states, children in alcoholic families often feel confused, unsure of who they are, and uncertain of their role in the family, community, and in society. They are filled with despair, conflict, resentment, anxiety, anger, and loneliness as the weight of the world seems to hang on their tiny shoulders:

> Aside from the normal emotions associated with "growing" pains, children of alcoholics must handle a variety of emotions for which they may be ill-equipped due to an inadequate state of emotional development. . . . the child takes on a [false] sense of identity or self-concept. . . . Some children of alcoholics feel that they were and are unwanted. They see themselves in positions of inferiority, inadequacy, and even worthlessness. (p.66).

These children are afraid to be who they are and afraid of taking on the roles of an adult. They carefully monitor how they think, feel and act. They are deprived of love and other basic needs, which in turn leaves them with feelings of insecurity. Authors such as Glasser (1984); Maslow (1962); Miller (1983); Weil (1973) and Whitfield (1989) indicate, "In ideal circumstances, some human needs must be fulfilled so that our Child Within [or our Spiritual Self] can develop and grow." (p.17). The same authors have compiled a list of basic

needs intrinsic to one's relationship with oneself and with the people around them. Whitfield (1989), then goes on to say, ". . . we apparently require most of these needs" (p.17). He lists the needs which are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1. A Hierarchy of Human Needs (Taken from Whitfield 1989, 18) (Compiled in part from Glasser, 1984; Maslow, 1962; Miller, 1981; Weil, 1973)

1. Survival
2. Safety
3. Touching, skin contact
4. Attention
5. Mirroring and echoing
6. Guidance
7. Listening
8. Being Real
9. Participating
10. Acceptance: Others are aware of, take seriously and admire the Real You, Tolerance of your feelings, Validation, Respect, Belonging and love
11. Opportunity to grieve losses and grow
12. Support
13. Loyalty and trust
14. Accomplishment: Mastery, 'Power,' 'Creativity,' Having a sense of completion, making a contribution
15. Altering one's state of mind
16. Sexuality
17. Enjoyment or fun
18. Freedom
19. Nurturing

20. Unconditional love (including connection with a Higher Power) (p.18).

Children in alcoholic homes face the adult world early in life, a world where people continue to hurt one another, refusing to accept their own responsibilities. In situations like these, the child tends to miss important learning processes therefore finding it difficult to become a responsible, loving human being. Cork (1987) states;

> . . . children . . . feel parental rejection. Some accept the situation passively, while others become hostile and seek escape. They are overly concerned with the future to the point of worrying about their own marriages . . . they think family life is not worthwhile (p.60).

Young people subjected to such an alcoholic environment quickly lose their sense of belonging, feeling more like an adult than a young person. O'Gorman and Oliver-Diaz (1987) state;

> Having an alcoholic parent has a direct impact on the way you parent. . . . children of alcoholics have problems with intimate relationships, seek approval constantly and fear authority figures. . . . children . . . see the world as either black or white and have difficulty having fun. . . . [or] are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold onto a relationship. . . . children of alcoholics often feel lost and frightened when they become parents (p.4).

In our lives there are changes that leave us scrambling to meet our daily needs. Change in our personal lives is inevitable. Change happens all around us and for the alcoholic, as Woodside (1986) and Wholley (1984) point out, " the family member or friend . . . is paying a tremendous price (p.xvi) due to the

consistent inconsistencies in [his or her] behavior, attitudes and rules which change according to the level of alcohol in the . . . blood stream."

First Nations People are spiritual people. Most have developed a strong respect for God the Creator and creation itself. As First Nations People grow, they may choose to live a balanced life - a balance that nurtures and connects the body, mind, soul and spirit of the person to family, community, and all life within nature. This in our culture is good. As the Royal Commissions Report (1996) points out, ". . . Aboriginal concepts . . . take the view that all the elements of life and living are interdependent and, by extension, well-being flows from balance and harmony among the elements of a personal collective life." (p.205). I believe a balanced life comes forth by listening to and accepting valuable teachings by the Elders. Their teachings include wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, truth, humility, and faith in a Higher Power than ourselves. It is important to note that all tribes vary in values and individual differences and according to Winter (1992), "Each tribe considers itself to be distinctly different from others, [and] because of these extensive tribal and individual differences, it can be understood that no researcher has yet listed the particular value orientation of each tribe." (p.22). However, as Cajete (1994), has pointed out, native American peoples hold many common core values.

When the inner spirit of First Nations People becomes unbalanced and stifled by alcohol the natural way of meeting everyday needs is disrupted or destroyed. As Thomas (1981) states;

> Western civilization has almost replaced the natural world as the environment for Indians. And Indian communities have responded and tried to adapt to this new and over-whelming social environment. In the

> process Indian groups have taken over a great many European ways, but, perhaps more important, tradition has been weakened and called into question, the relations between kin disturbed, and the moral prestige of the elderly eroded . . . (p.31).

Change, as mentioned earlier, is inevitable and when it happens, there are many aspects that are beyond First Nations control. First Nations Children living with alcohol find any means they can to meet and fulfill their personal needs. Destructiveness is found within the family system on a constant basis. They face continuous negativism and are often confused about who they really are. As Woititz (1983) states, ". . . children of alcoholics . . . have a low self-esteem. This is not surprising, since . . . the conditions which lead an individual to value himself and to regard himself as a person of worth can be . . . summarized by the terms 'parental warmth,' 'clearly defined limits,' and respectful treatment.' " (p.xvi). Children in alcoholic homes lack the above mentioned elements needed for healthy growth and development and I strongly believe they do become parents to their own parents and siblings.

Parents are the primary care givers in a child's life. In First Nations Communities the role of the parent has been taken over by the extended family (either grandparents or aunts) due to high consistent drinking by the natural parents. This is not to say they are bad, but the prevalent use of alcohol prevents them from being the kind of parent they might wish to be. Children who are continuously exposed to alcohol become vulnerable targets, learning to use alcohol to help them through life's crisis. These children learn quickly how limited their choices are because of alcohol. Making choices in life is an important learning process and for First Nations People this process includes

listening to and respecting each other, but more importantly respecting one's own values incorporated through the teachings of the elders. Life, as pointed out by Woititz (1983), is:

> . . . an ongoing process. If you are centered, if you are in control of your feelings, thoughts and desires, you journey through life . . . and experience each phase fully and completely. . . . choices are yours, whatever they may be. You are in charge . . . [and it is up to you to make choices that best suit your needs] (p.120-121).

First Nations People are taught from birth that all living things have a purpose in life. Today, many have lost that purpose in their own lives and are instead bombarded with the false spirit of alcohol. A falseness that makes the poor feel rich, the old feel young and the weak feel powerful, but this lasts for such a short time and adds more conflict to an already unstable situation. It is during times like these that I very much believe people treat alcohol as a God, a Higher Power which helps them to cope with the struggles of daily living. This aspect of the First Nations struggles brings to mind a Bible character named Ruth. It is a story of a woman who forsakes her former heritage in order to cling to the people of Israel and to God. The story is written at a time when Israel was in the midst of rebellion and immorality and Ruth's faithfulness to God and those around her becomes quite apparent. This type of faithfulness to ones kin and to the realities of their life styles holds quite true for First Nation families. As Ruth follows the pathway of her people and God she states, ". . . entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (The New Open Bible 1990; p.317). Children react the same way

to their parents as Ruth reacted to the situation that she was in. Children believe their parents are doing the right thing so they follow in the footsteps set before them without realizing it is a road to destruction and turmoil.

People live a double standard when it comes to alcohol. Children are continuously told alcohol is not good, but yet those who give this advice continue to indulge in it themselves. Where alcohol is present, children often identify with the negative behaviors associated with alcoholism within the home, community and society. If it is modeled everywhere, there seems to be no escape from it's treacherous grip. Ullman & Orenstein (1994), show how children identify and follow the patterns of interactions within the family unit with the following statement;

> . . . before children and offspring ever drink, they have seen how to behave when intoxicated. In playing their roles in these episodes they have also been rehearsing for the role of the drinker, . . . they are likely to be ambivalent and anxious about their own use of alcohol [and] . . . to expect that alcohol will help them to be and to feel powerful (p. 8-9).

The history of alcoholism within First Nation communities is based on what seems to be the norm of the social system that we live in. Conversely it is also the nature of the individual First Nation person who is a part of this social system. Studies by Ackerman (1983); Jaynes & Ruggs (1988); and O 'Gorman & Oliver-Diaz (1987) brings to the forefront evidence that shows how strongly adolescents and children reflect the behaviors of their parents. Children do what they see their parents do. Jaynes & Ruggs (1988) state, "adolescents strongly reflect their parents behavior. . . . children learn or imitate both positive and negative parental drinking behaviors as they grow up and that such behaviors

become incorporated . . . into the young person's own behavior pattern." (p. 102-103).

Elders teach that life experiences are necessary, and as we learn from each, we begin an upward spiral towards a higher level of understanding of who we are as individuals. Children living with alcohol, live in a state of fear and despair with little or no parental guidelines to follow. They do not experience a normal life, but feel there is no other way. They fail to understand what is happening, therefore life experiences are uncertain, which results in problems that leave the child blaming his or herself for what is happening. In an article Understanding Indian Children Learning From Elders, Garrett (1994), quotes an Elder who states:

> The (Indian) children are our future, but we (elders) are their bridge to the past, while they are the bridge to the future. . . . We . . . all benefit from intergenerational programs and activities that encourage involvement and sharing. . . . children are like little sponges . . . that can absorb even more than we realize through observation and learning. . . The closeness of the family has been threatened with the "new survival" . . . in a hostile environment . . . including the persuasiveness of drug and alcohol abuse . . . by so many youths. (p.18-19).

The impact of alcohol on First Nations People has been horribly devastating and crippling. It leaves them in a state of oppression. Young people soak up the modeling techniques of parents, teachers, relatives, elders and leaders at such phenomenally high rates that the consequences are often scary to think about. Children are drinking at an earlier age than their parents. This shows the bridge from our past has been corroded and still is corroded with

alcohol. We must now clean those bridges from past debris and plant our children and grandchildren's feet on clean uplifting bridges free from alcohol. We must accept and take the weight of alcohol abuse off the shoulders of our youth so they to can begin to heal from within.

Alcohol too often becomes the norm in First Nation communities and try as we might there seems to be little one can do to control the destructive drinking habits of our generation. Lack of communication, mistrust and silence are all part of First Nation survival where alcohol is concerned. To be drunk means one can interact more fully with others without fear, one can trust easier if they are drunk, drunkenness gives one the courage to face reality yet silence and shame is the result once they are sober. Generation after generation have been unable to deal with the impact of alcohol in life and many other contributing factors add to the distress it causes. Thomas (1981), lists a few beginning affects of alcohol as he states:

> In Canada. . . tribal groups have generally been unable to deal with heavy alcohol use. Placement on reservations, affairs completely administered by the federal government, their religions and cultures were attacked and discredited, and their children placed in schools. The school was designed to "de-Indianize" them [a process that collapsed the structural system of a noble people] (p.33).

Destruction of the family system and the prevalent use of alcohol has brought more negativism, destruction, and confusion into the lives of First Nations People (Thomas, 1981). The more families indulge in alcohol the more it leads to criminal offenses, family troubles, and suicide. Living with alcohol becomes unbearable for many youths and they soon lose sight of who they are.

Overcoming the deformities of alcoholism within the family system often results in added problems, which in turn leaves feelings of failure and self-blame. Woodside (1986) states, "Children of alcoholics usually feel guilty and responsible for their parent's alcoholism. . . . they think parental drinking is their fault." (p.448). Alcohol effects every aspect of a child's life.

For the First Nations Child there is little for them to do in their communities. The resources provided by the government are very limited, and as a result there are no community projects or outreach centers in place for them. Once again as studies by Cork (1987); Jaynes & Rugg (1988); and O'Gorman & Oliver-Diaz (1987) indicate, treatment and recovery is geared for the adult, " We therefore have little understanding of the sufferings of thousands of children in our communities." (p.Forward). Everyone seems too busy to deal with the younger population. Or is the problem adults who lack the knowledge of how to be parents, possibly a direct impact of alcoholism?

Today the problem of alcoholism, depression, violence, and self-destructive behaviors is rampant within our communities. I ask the question; 'What are the causes leading to such problems'? Woodside (1986) states, "problems associated with parental alcohol misuse pass from parent to child, and grandparent to grandchild as the family cycle of pain continues." (p.448). She then goes on to list further problems associated with alcohol abuse and the child. These are: 1) children feel guilty for their parent's alcoholism, 2) they feel invisible or unloved, 3) they are anxious and insecure about themselves, 4) they lack self-confidence, 5) they are not risk takers and are overly anxious to pick up cues and learn, 6) they are prone to reality distortion, 7) they have difficulty separating the real from the unreal, 8) they deny, overlook, and

ignore bizarre events in the home, 9) they have few friends and avoid open interaction with anyone, 10) they fear embarrassment and are afraid to trust, 11) they are more likely than others youngsters to have mental, emotional and physical problems, 12) they are school drop-outs, marry earlier than others, etc. How can we help First Nations Youths cope with feelings of helplessness and poor self-worth? Is talking about it the first step in the healing process to recovery? I don't know the answers to these questions. I only hope this research will bring light to those who want to help the youths of today. The problem of alcohol is huge, but trying to get to the root of the problem may help in providing support systems for the youth. I believe whole families can heal and regain their confidence by bringing themselves back into balance with who they are.

Other studies (Casper & Elder, 1988; Cowan, Cohn, & Pearson, 1996; Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994; Volk, Edwards & Sprinkle, 1988;) all show consistent links between adults and their children and how these links become detached as alcohol takes control of their lives. The studies show ample evidence that a parents' insecurity can be conceptualized as a marker of risk for the quality of the parent-child relationship and how it effects the child's abilities to adapt. Memories, feelings, and expectations that parents derive from early relationships with their parents shape the current behaviors they have with their own children. For instance aggressive behaviors and the externalizing processes of the child tends to be passed down from the fathers, while internalizing and self-blame is the direct result stemming from mothers (Cowan, Cowan, Cohn & Pearson, 1996) The importance of understanding the impact of alcohol on the family system and attachments early in one's life is significant when trying to understand how lifestyles and family structuring changes from

one generation to the next. Identifying what parents carry internally can enhance understanding of how negative or positive patterns persist from one generation to the next.

By doing this study, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the First Nations Child and their life experiences with alcohol. Recommendations for this study will go beyond mere survival as I look for ways to help the child heal the inner spirit.

Purpose of the Research

Existing research evidence strongly suggests that excessive drinking by parents has a negative impact on children. Children imitate behaviors modeled by their parents. In many homes alcohol becomes the prominent factor in the development of similar personality characteristics between parent and child. Such characteristics as noted by Ackerman (1983) are, immaturity, anxiety, dependency, inferiority, depression, and low self-esteem. With such problems being incorporated from birth one can see how these problems may be compounded when the child reaches adulthood. Too often children of alcoholic parents become alcoholics themselves and therefore the process repeats itself into the next generation. However, many studies show that not all children of alcoholics become alcoholics. Some children do learn how to overcome the powerful effects of alcohol and yet others do not. As a researcher, I want to find out how the impact of alcohol can be broken before it is passed on to the next generation.

Basic Questions for the study:

How does the intergenerational impact of alcohol affect children today?

What can we do about it?

Method

The location I chose for this research is a First Nations community north of Winnipeg. I feel this community is an ideal community for doing this type of research because I see the impact alcohol is having on the young people and I feel there is a need for help. The people have come a long way in terms of healing, although there are those who are silent and believe silence is the only way to stop alcohol abuse. This community has its own Alcohol Recovery Center, but it is only in place for those who are eighteen and over. There is no direct outreach for young people under eighteen and only when the child is experiencing problems in the home or in the community does the social services worker intervene. While this community is well advanced in terms of community development, and to one visiting appears to have overcome many of the dysfunctions other communities face, it is still dealing with the problems of alcohol abuse.

Unsure of how to begin this project, I decided to personally contact higher authorities within the community. I met with the School Board and phoned the school administrators to let them know my interest in doing a study on the Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol on the First Nations Child. These people have been a real inspiration in modeling the approach this project has taken. The information and recommendations I received proved to be very valuable as was the interest they have in this type of study being done in the community. It was recommended that I begin with the school, then branch out into the community. Having accepted this advice I went ahead and contacted the principal of the school by telephone. The principal gave permission and more insight into what I should be doing to make this study run more smoothly.

It was stated at this time that follow up letters (see appendix A1 & A2) should be sent to each level of authority requesting written consent, which I did without delay. The letters ensure the confidentiality of any information gathered for the purpose of this study. The information needed for this study was collected from students in grades three, six, nine, and twelve, and their parents. From this sample one would normally expect a return of fifty percent, but due to the nature and sensitivity of the study I expected approximately ten percent. Letters (see appendix B1 & B2) were sent to each parent asking if they and their children would like to take part in this study. A self addressed, stamped envelope were included with each letter. The parents were asked to send their responses back as soon as possible so the next phase of the study could begin.

Confidentiality and anonymity of all information was held in highest regard to protect the rights of all participants. The research code of ethics addresses individual rights to dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm (Glesne & Peshkin 1992, 110). Written stories from participants were used only to extract pertinent information relevant to this study. Judgment and interpretation of feelings and behaviors was not interjected at any time during interviews so as not to lead the participants during the study. The stories were not used to gather evidence against any one person, but were used as a grouped analysis of information in regards to the impact of alcohol within the community. Through personal stories I wanted to gain an in-depth view of the problems transferred from one generation to the next. From the information gathered, recommendations have been put together to help teachers, parents and counselors in dealing with troubled young people associated with alcohol.

The first source of data was stories collected from participants taking part in the study. The stories did not include any names, only the age and gender of the writer. Story writing about one's life has a way of generating information that is rich in detail and embedded with context (Wholey, 1984, p3). By asking the child and the parent to write personal stories, I was also asking him or her to open doors that have been kept closed for years. I was asking them to be honest as they let their feelings flow to the outer surface of their being.

The second source of data was personal interviews with at least three effective alcohol counselors and/or elders from the community. An effective counselor, for the purpose of this study, is defined as someone who has overcome the impact of alcohol in his or her life and has determinedly given guidance to youth on this topic. The interviews consisted of gathering information on, as well as personal reflections of, the healing process each counselor went through, and how they use this process to help children and others heal. Interviews with the counselors were recorded and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. An interview protocol (see appendix C) has been used as a guide when interviewing counselors and relevant participants who are the adult children of alcoholic parents. By using stories and personal interviews I gained valuable information which will led to recommendations for support programs and healing opportunities for youths in First Nation Communities.

Letters were sent out to parents requesting permission for participation in March, 1997. The month of April, 1997 was designated for doing the literature search and the proposal write-up. May 1, 1997 marked the commencement of my collection of stories for those who have sent back the permission forms.

Some of the consent forms were returned by the end of May, 1997. I began this research in hopes of collecting stories from school age children, because it was the child I saw suffering the most. In my ignorance, I failed to see the inner suffering of the adults until they reached out with their own stories. The participants specifically indicated they did not want their children to tell their stories of alcohol and this I deeply respected. As a result of this I did not go into the school as was planned and therefore had to make a few changes in how I was going to do the research and gather information for this delicate issue. It was at this point that I decided to collect stories from the adult which was to include information from as far back as one was able to remember. No interviews were done with the parents because the stories covered the main issues of the research topic.

Participants were then contacted by phone for specific instructions on doing the stories. A letter reinstating what was said during the phone conversation followed soon afterwards (see appendix A). Three counselors were contacted by phone to find out if they would be interested in taking part in this research. Two of the three counselors contacted accepted the invitation to take part in the study while one backed out at the last minute leaving two counselors participating in the study. At this time I scheduled a time and place for each interview. One of the interviewees did not want to meet in person and felt more comfortable talking over the phone and this I accepted without question. The conversation lasted approximately forty minutes. The interview protocol (see appendix C) was used to keep on track. The second interview was held in the home of the counselor. There was soft background music playing, and the atmosphere was very peaceful. Again the interview protocol was used to keep on task and to make sure that important information was not being left

out. This interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. The counselors were very supportive on various ideas and were very informative when giving information. It was also stated that more research of this nature needs to be done because there are many areas that needs to be looked at in respect to both child, parent, and other family members. Both counselors indicated that we are only scratching the surface. The problem of alcohol has many dark, underlying secrets that need to be identified and dealt with in order for healing to have a positive outcome.

A third source of data was to be visits to other First Nation Communities which had already developed effective programs. At this time I was to collect documents, interviews, and fieldnotes with a continued focus on children. Information on how to develop and implement effective programs culturally relevant to one's community was also to be investigated. Information gathered was to be correlated with the data collected from the literature, stories, and interviews. Attempts at contacting other First Nations communities was unsuccessful. Because of this, the information within this research may be biased in the sense that the information comes mainly from the one community. Although the information was collected from 5% of one hundred twenty-five respondents, I believe it is safe to say that many First Nations People suffer in silence and will continue to suffer if they fail to speak out.

All participants sent their stories to me at which time I began to analyze and classify the information into significant categories. In total there were seven stories received from participants of two First Nations communities. The stories were from adult participants, four female and three male. The interviews were from two counselors, one male and one female. The male counselor lives and

works in a First Nations community, while the female counselor is well known by First Nations communities across Canada. Her travels to various communities across Canada conducting healing seminars on alcohol and abuse has brought much understanding and healing to the people.

As I read each story, the pain and hurt each participant suffered became quite apparent. Each story was read and reread and each time specific themes began to surface. As each theme surfaced, I wrote them down and began to watch for underlying details that would back up the specific questions related to this study. The main questions being, How does the intergenerational impact of alcohol affect children in todays society and what can we do about it? The stories not only answered these questions, but also brought more questions to the surface. This research opens many doors to further studies as we look for ways to deal with families and the problems associated with alcohol.

Results

As I collected information for this study I soon realized people were not ready to open up and talk of past experiences. Some became bitter and angry that someone from their own culture would even think of digging up past experiences. One female caller responded by saying, " Why is it so important to dig up the past when we buried it for so long? I can't see how you can help anyone by digging into their past. You will not get anyone here to take part in this study because it's too personal." As I sat at the other end of the phone I could hear the hurt and pain coming through and yet I felt powerless to help. How do you get someone to open up when they are not ready? Other people became silent and withdrawn, while others willingly talked of their past, but refused to have it recorded in any way. Gathering information was no easy task and I soon realized more time would be needed to accomplish the task that lay ahead.

I began this study by sending out one hundred twenty-five letters to parents of students in grades three, six, nine, and twelve. From this number there was a positive return of 5%. From this 5%, 3% were females ranging in the age group of 30 - 43 years, (referred to in the study as, "Sarah," "Joan," "Arlene," and "Penny"). The remaining 2% were male respondents ranging in the age group of 31 - 51 years, (referred to in this study as, "Ben," "Kevin," and "Ron"). Permission to gather stories and interviews from children was not granted, therefore information pertaining to this study was collected from the adult child only. The counselors who were interviewed will be referred to in this study as, ("Issac" and "Simone.") Name changes were made to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity to the participants. Visits to three other First

Nations Communities was unsuccessful. Communities were busy and arranging meetings was difficult to schedule. As I spoke to various resource people I sensed fear; fear of the unknown, and yet there was a strong desire to see a study of this nature being done. This study is, considering the actual problem, unfinished. Healing takes time and only begins when we see what is happening. Healing must begin within ourselves before it can branch out into the community. Once we see what is happening in our own lives we have no time to look and point fingers at others because there is so much to heal from within ourselves. There are many issues to be looked at when developing effective programs culturally relevant to First Nations People and their communities.

As I began to read and analyze the stories many issues came to the surface. Participants spoke deeply of their feelings on alcohol, the impact it had on their lives and how they very much wanted to see changes for future generations. For the purpose of this particular study, I chose to develop and speak on the five issues holding the most importance for me although other issues which continued to surface are of equal importance. The five issues are:

1. Learned Behaviors not Our Own - This section deals with taking on the behaviors modeled by parents, grandparents, elders, teachers, leaders, etc.. A child can find who they are by understanding the behavioral patterns of previous generations and how they relate to this behavioral pattern. It is important to recognize the abnormality of the dysfunctional alcoholic behaviors of previous generations.

2. Focus of Concern - deals with the psychological gaps in one's life due to inconsistent parenting. It focuses on the violence and destructiveness within the family, as well as the many abuses the child of an alcoholic faces. It talks of

the fear and danger, the silence and shame that goes with it, as well as the loss of self-respect and respect for others.

3. Is Leaving the Answer? - Deals with leaving home to get away from the devastating effects of alcohol in one's life, whether it be through parent, self, or significant others. This section also touches upon the residential syndrome as being the most devastating to First Nations People often causing them to turn to alcohol as a means of escape.

4. Healing Within - Spiritual Help - points out how important it is for one to recognize that it takes a Higher Power than our own to bring healing into our lives. Recognizing the importance of sharing with others brings healing, restoration, and strength to one's life. As an individual wanting to heal one must be able to turn one's suffering and confusion over to a Higher Power. A person needs to know what it is they are turning over. One must be allowed to experience the conflicts, feelings, and frustrations within one's life in order to see the darkness caused by alcohol and how it destroys the beauty within the individual. The importance of choosing to heal on one's own rather than being forced into it is an important step because the reality comes from within one's self.

5. Loneliness and Healing - This section deals with the loneliness in one's life as one begins the road to healing. The unmasking of hidden behaviors and breaking the silence one has endured for so long. Beginning to understand who one is as one works through the inner pains to find the spiritual child within.

Each of the sections I address will include pieces of the participants' stories followed by what the counselors have to say in regards to each issue.

The first issue I labeled, 'Learned Behavior Not Our Own' because many of the participants spoke about learning from parents and grandparents. What they saw and learned as a child remained with them throughout adulthood, therefore teaching their own children according to the way they were taught. It becomes clear how the cycle of alcohol abuse continues to repeat itself without any changes being made and until one begins to look deep within themselves and want change, only then does change happen.

Learned Behaviors Not Our Own

Exploring the relationship between child, parent, and grandparent along with the impact of alcohol on that relationship has suggested interesting findings regarding the behavioral patterns of people throughout the generations. What emerges most clearly is that dysfunctional alcoholic behaviors are being seen as normal behaviors by the child, the parent, and the community. With this in mind I am reminded of a saying I have often heard elders repeat, "Whatever we sow, we shall also reap." One needs to find strength within one's self in order to fight and take control of the external happenings. If one fails to find satisfactory strength then one has difficulty facing reality. People need to see their own behaviors in order to deal with them. Participants have indicated they didn't know the way they were living was sick and abnormal because behaviors such as drinking, fighting, screaming at one another, yelling, hitting, etc. was all part of a normal life style in most communities. Many encountered this type of behavior on a daily basis, therefore, it became a normal thing, even though they may have despised such behavior. Sometimes entire communities were like this, so you didn't think of it as being sick or dysfunctional. You fit in to belong, and if you were different then you were labeled an outcast. Janet Hardwick (1996), an author of a short story in Word Aglow points out how

careless we can be as we teach young people to follow the right path. She states:

> Everyday you and I sow seeds. Today's seeds are tomorrow's harvest. And what we harvest depends on what seeds we sow. . . . Careless sowing can result in disastrous situations that may continue to haunt the sower for a lifetime. . . . Remember every act you perform is seed for crop. Whether you are horrified by what springs up or delighted depends on how and what you sow (Hardwick, 1996 : p.4).

Participants described their behaviors as being consistent to that of their own parents. The style of drinking and the consequences of the drinking patterns varied widely from person to person and family to family but non-the-less each resulted in similar patterns from generation to generation. Arlene recalls seeing alcohol being present in the home from a very early age. She indicated that wine was always part of the daily meal, but the alcohol was never abused by her parents. However, she turned to alcohol early in life. Arlene relates alcohol to friendship and has witnessed the tragedy alcohol caused in the homes of many of her friends. To her alcohol helped the socialization process between friends, therefore having a few drinks would not hurt anyone until it happened to her. She felt it was okay because it was something she related to as being part of a normal life style. She has this to say:

> I grew up in a household where there was always liquor present, generally in small quantities. I was exposed from a very young age to the social drinking attitudes of my parents. There was almost always a bottle of wine served with every Sunday meal. When I was around eleven, I too was allowed to have a glass of wine. Alcohol was never a taboo in our

> home. It was always present, and looking back now, I can see it was never really abused by my parents.

Some participants stated they have never witnessed their parents drinking and weren't too sure why they themselves were drinkers. The participants indicate that the influences within the community was a great factor in helping them to decide whether or not to consume alcohol. They felt they needed to fit in and be part of the crowd and drinking was the only way to do that since most of their friends drank. Yet others stated only the fathers drank while the mothers were the pillars in the family. Mothers were always there to protect as Ben indicates in his story:

> I took for granted . . . and began to believe alcohol was part of our lifestyle. It was the common and accepted norm for many families including my own. To look back on those years brings both joy and tears. The only positive outcome at this time was my mother. My mother was the stronghold of the family. I now believe it was her strength, presence, and unconditional love that kept the family so secure. She was a tower of strength and even though we must have broken her heart many times, she showed only love and wisdom to each of us.

Still, other participants have witnessed both parents drinking and abusing alcohol to the point of creating total disaster for the entire family, while others such as Arlene seen alcohol as a part of their daily agenda and to her alcohol was part of the family norm. But, regardless of which parent drank or how often they drank, it became apparent from the stories that alcohol created nothing but an unpredictable abnormal life setting for all family members. In most cases it was the children who suffered and they are still suffering today. This suffering

happens without parents realizing that they themselves are demonstrating behaviors their children may identify with for the rest of their lives. As indicated earlier, careless sowing can result in a disastrous harvest that can continue to haunt for a lifetime. Kevin, ancther participant, has this to say about the effects of alcohol on his young life and how these memories often come back to haunt him:

> When I was growing up my dad drank a lot. He was an alcoholic. The life I had growing up was very hard, for myself, for my sisters, and for my brothers. My mom drank too, but not too much. She often went with our dad hoping he would not come home and fight us. . . . I can remember my dad using my sister for a footstool. When I was small, dad used to crack boiled eggs on me and my friends in front of his friends. One time he pointed a loaded gun to my head. He wanted to see the fear on my face. He would often throw my mom and us kids out in the snow in the middle of winter and we would have to walk to my granny's.

This behavioral pattern by fathers was seen throughout most of the stories and yet there seemed to be an inner respect for the person, just not for the alcoholic behavior. Reading through each story one could feel not only the love radiating out towards the parents, but also a deep hatred for what was taking place behaviorally. It seems as though something grips the inner spirit of the drinker and refuses to let go, which results in the child or children suffering from loneliness, fear, anger, and numerous other feelings which they have no way of understanding or dealing with. As Ron indicates in his story:

> My experiences with alcohol relates back to when I was young. My parents drank until they died. I didn't understand that when we went

> hungry it could have been because of the alcohol. I just thought that everyone lived like we did. My mother and father's drinking did not have a negative effect on me back then, but I now know that drinking excessively can and does effect children in negative ways. Our parents were caring, loving, and beautiful parents.

Simone, one of the counselors, states many people fail to recognize where their behaviors are coming from. They feel the behaviors they display are normal because they have been shaped according to past generations. People too often structure their lives on the lives of the previous generation without really identifying with their own individuality. Too often people fail to recognize who they are and what they really want in life because they have never been given the chance to venture out alone. Simone indicates this ideology quite clearly in the following statement, (also see Appendix D for Behavioral Patterning of Families which she uses in her counseling sessions):

> This behavioral pattern can be seen in family genealogies and you can even see how precise these patterns are from one generation to the next. Because of these behaviors and the shame people feel it is difficult to get them to open up. People would rather keep the silence and have life go on as it was without dealing with the problem. People keep silent for years and all the while this demon within keeps eating away their inner being, so what do they do? They cover it up some more by drinking more and therefore the cycle continues with negative behaviors being shown on a daily basis.

The next concern we all face is the impact of alcohol in our lives. We all know and have experienced from time to time that alcohol not only has impact on

us, but it has an even greater impact on those closest to us, specifically our children. Alcohol has left many lives in turmoil. It has brought us much shame, humiliation, inconsistencies, voids, abuses, fear, loneliness, etc.. Participants spoke about their feelings and losses in very positive ways because they are now able to see the destruction alcohol causes in the lives of those closest to them. Each participant, both parent and counselor shared inner feelings and gave valuable insight into the healing process. This issue I labeled, 'Focus of Concern' because it speaks of the concerns we all have about the impact of alcohol in our lives.

Focus of Concern

Today alcohol has left many children and adults with deep psychological voids or gaps. These gaps are the result of inconsistent parenting, as well as the lack of appropriate and emotional supports. Alcohol has taken everything from the family, including self-respect and respect for others. Children harden themselves to any outside forces and often do not allow for their own needs to be met. Joan, one of the participants says she began her drinking at the age of seventeen. She stated she never really saw her parents drink when she was young, only when she was older and this had a dramatic impact on the family. Joan says she only drank to be part of the crowd, which shows peer pressure also has a lot to do with young people taking alcohol. Joan labels herself as a happy drunk and only drinks to have a good time. She also stated there was a period in her life where she lost who she was because alcohol took control. This is what she has to say about that period in her life:

> There was a period in my life when I moved to the city. This became my drinking period. I drank almost everyday during the five months that I

> lived in the city. I lost a lot of weight, but most of all I lost who I was and what I stood for. I lost all respect for myself. I did anything to get money for booze. I really didn't care and felt that no one else gave a damn what was happening to me. The boozing and partying helped me to close my eyes to what was happening to me. I was no longer a person, but a product of alcohol. I feel you must read the truth in order to see the horrible hold alcohol has on us as Native People and human beings. I let myself go. I didn't know it then, but when I look back on it now I can clearly see how alcohol destroys who you are. I worked the streets because there was a lot of other things going on in my life, things I was unable to deal with at the time. You see, I too, was abused as a child and maybe this is all part of the cycle. . . . I came back, sobered up, and started my road of healing and recovery, but believe me this was not an easy road to ride.

A number of the participants clearly recall the violence and abuse they were submitted to as children because of alcohol. Many have witnessed their parents arguing and fighting with one another. The experiences and the histories of one's past with alcohol has and will stifle self-development and growth that is needed to be successful at becoming functional and productive in society. Children were and are faced with a significant amount of verbal abuse and it often doesn't matter to the abuser(s) if they are wrong. The impressions and feelings left by this type of harassment remains with the child for a lifetime. When trying to help a child come to terms with these various feelings one must be able to see the interrelatedness between alcoholism and abuse whether it be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological. Abuse within the family system does not and often will not show visible results. One does not have to carry

around black and blue marks to realize that he or she has been abused. Abuse comes in many forms and can leave a person mentally and physically incompetent when dealing with life situations. Emotional abuse leaves many invisible scars and frequently carries the potential for physical abuse later in one's life. We must remember this behavior is learned and is often not our own. In reality, it is someone else's behavior that is learned because no one taught us any differently. Children frequently experience intensely frightening and dangerous situations that leaves its toll on their young lives. This is evident in the story told by Kevin when he speaks of his father pointing a loaded gun to his head. His view was that his father only wanted to see the fear on his face.

Penny, another participant has this to say as she tries hard to understand why her father acted the way he did when he tried to shoot her. At this point in her life she is unable to understand how something like this can happen when one claims to love you. Here is her version of the episode that continues to haunt her to this day:

> To go back to my father's influence on my life, he had a very kind heart and used to do everything for me. He gave me all I needed in clothes, money, and emotional support. I don't see my father as a bad influence, but I don't understand how a person that I loved and cared for so much would try to shoot me. This is one incident that I have never come to terms with and I really don't know if I ever will. I have tried many times to understand and deal with this but something keeps blocking my mind. When my father passed away, I resented him and I told myself to hate him for trying to shoot me, but I couldn't because he was the only father that I knew. I blame the alcohol for his behavior because he never would

> have done such a thing if he were sober. Even now I feel the effects alcohol had on my life, therefore I don't drink very much. I know the destruction it causes in one's life.

The sadness felt by Penny is quite apparent. As one reads between the lines one could sense the fear of revealing to much of ones' self. There is a strong love for those who harm and yet the abnormal behavior is brushed aside leaving alcohol as the sole heir to blame.

Simone , one of the counselors, stated she had to deal heavily with her alcoholic problem. Her first advice to those who seek help is to look deep within your own self. She says if you look deep within yourself, you begin to see many unwanted behaviors, behaviors passed down to you from your parents and grandparents and that is where you must begin your healing. Too many of our people hide within themselves. We have been silenced to long about the impact of alcohol on our lives and it is now time to open up and rebuild from the inside out; tear down the walls we built for protection because they only create more hurt and pain for us. She states:

> There are no hopeless cases. We only build walls around ourselves and we do not allow ourselves to come out. The scariest part of this life is when nothing in it matters anymore. Until we allow ourselves outside the wall we've built only then will we begin to heal ourselves.

Isaac, a male counselor, indicated the family has lost much because of alcohol. Families have been stripped of self-respect and respect for others. Blame is laid on the innocent which in most cases is the children. There are many "ifs" in life, but no healing because we fail to recognize that which hurts

the family the most, alcohol. With alcohol in our lives, we can hide because it acts as a shield to underlying behaviors. This is what Issac says about alcohol in the lives of families:

> The morals and values that were once so dominant within Native families is now lost to the spirit of alcohol and gambling. Self-respect and respect for others becomes a farce because alcohol and gambling controls the behaviors and activities of the person. Children are silenced, and they quietly absorb all behaviors and activities associated with alcohol and other clutches of life. They harden themselves, having no feelings of their own, as if to divide their being and say I will no longer use this side of me. I must be strong, but I will do it without feeling.

Cutting themselves off from any feelings is only one way children deal with the hurting effects of alcohol. This behavior is then carried into adulthood and when the child marries he or she tends to close themselves off from their own families which results in no communication, therefore the pattern repeats itself once again and the cycle keeps growing. As one respondent stated, "The cycle does not stop itself, it's like a snowball rolling down a hill, the steeper the hill the more it collects. This is the way for many of our Native People."

The third issue which participants, both parents and counselors dealt with was that of leaving or running away from the problem itself, therefore labeled ' Is Leaving the Answer'. Participants indicated time and time again how hard it was to deal with the painful hurting effects of alcohol in their lives. Many believed if they left home the problem would go away, but found themselves even deeper into the horrifying grasp of alcohol.

Is Leaving the Answer?

Another interesting finding was the fact that many of the participants left home at an early age only to find this did not solve the problem. In fact, many have said the problem escalated to the point of trying to commit suicide as a way out. Some left home for good reasons, but ended up turning to alcohol as a means of coping. Others left as an escape from what was happening only to find themselves in further turmoil and deeper into alcohol. Still others left home because they wanted to be independent and free from alcohol and abuse within the home. Some talked about being taken away and sent to residential or boarding school. Regardless of the reason for wanting to move the effects were still the same. Each one of the participants reported alcohol gripped them like a vise that would not let go until they looked deep within themselves and admitted to themselves there was a problem. This is what Ben had to say:

> My struggle with alcohol began in my teen years. I left home at the age of sixteen to attend high school in Winnipeg. My first two years away from home were quite uneventful. Eventually I began going out and I was soon caught up in the big city way of life. . . . I was never away from home alone before and this move was very frightening for me. I didn't know the city, and I was placed in a home with people who knew nothing about me or I them. . . . One thing that became apparent to me was the consumption of alcohol. I not only saw the effects and the importance that people put on alcohol at this time, but I too, began to use it. . . . I saw only the 'good' side of alcohol which was the only thing that I wanted to see at this time. I lived a double life. I would go to school all week and then on week-ends I would party.

Sarah, one of the participants, began to drink when she was fourteen years old, maybe even younger. She comes from a large family and since she has no recollection of seeing her parents consume alcohol she, doesn't know why she turned to alcohol. Sarah struggles with communication. She feels the loss of her parents even though her parents live together in marriage. As a young child she remembers her father as being away all the time. There never seemed to be any time for family sharing because her parents had to go out and work to support the family. Sarah lived a lonely life and turned to alcohol as a means of opening up and having fun. She believes the boarding school system has taken a lot from her parents although they never spoke about it much. She believes the boarding school system has a lot to do with her own drinking habits. She has this to say:

> I ran away from home because of drinking. I felt ashamed, guilty, remorse, and was so sick from drinking. I never knew what I did because of the black-outs and passing out from drinking to much. I would hitchhike to Winnipeg and come home three days later. A friend talked to me and told me running away from my problems doesn't help, it just makes things worse. . . . I remember once, I tried to commit suicide by taking pills, but that just made me more sick. I knew I had a drinking problem, but I never once thought I was an alcoholic. I was a week-end drinker. . . . I know I used and hurt people because of my drinking. I missed work, . . . I lost my license, . . . I froze my feet, . . . I lost and broke my glasses, . . . I never had a relationship, . . . and I spent a lot of money all because of drinking. . . . I needed help and I didn't know who to turn to. . . . Mom and Dad had no parenting because they did not have parenting skills passed on to them. Mom was in boarding school and Dad

was given away when he was born. How and where would they get these skills so vital in teaching and raising our own children.

Penny was always searching for something that was missing in her life. She too, felt the effects of alcohol in the home and blames residential schools for the way her parents were. She stated her mother never showed any emotions and many times Penny needed a mother's love which she never got. Penny loved her mother dearly, but there was no communication in the home and the children felt unloved much of the time, although outwardly the parents were good providers. Here is what Penny has to say:

> . . . alcohol played a significant role in my life both as a child and as a parent. I left home as soon as I could in order to become independent and to get away from the situation at home. I always looked for comfort in other peoples' lives. I wanted a family that was close to me and me to them. I wanted to laugh and tease and be teased back and laughed with. But, how can one get this in a family where everyone was always scared to say the wrong thing? This I believe is not a family that knows how to talk to or share with one another. My mother was not an emotional person. I often blame residential schooling for this. Many of my people who were sent to these schools did not learn how to become emotionally supportive because they were never exposed to this type of relationship between mother and child.

Ron also describes how moving from a small town to a big city effected his life; how alcohol took control and how as a teenager he was unable to cope with facing the reality of alcohol in the home. He never brought friends home

unless they were in similar situations to his own. He felt others made fun of him and was always aware of how different his life style was. He states:

> Alcohol started to have a negative effect on me when we moved to the city. By this time I was a teenager. I remember dreading to come home from school and finding the house all dirty or when you went to school with the house in a mess and having to come home to that mess. I never brought back any friends to my house except the friends who lived on my street and shared the same experiences as I. I remember one time when I had to go up for an award in school and I didn't have anything good to wear.

Kevin also talks of his experiences with alcohol once he left home. He indicated that he just had to try out the spirit that had such a strong hold on his dad. He found, as time went on, the alcohol only brought more hurt and destruction into his life. He saw the personality changes within his brothers and sisters when they drank and it disgusted him. Many feelings were suppressed but came out in many ways when alcohol was involved. Here is what he has to say:

> My dad kept all his money when he worked. Finally mom had enough, and she decided to go to school. She wanted to educate herself to make a better life for us. During this time I went my own way. I was only twelve years old when I left home. I wanted to be independent and not have to rely on anyone for anything. During this time I promised myself that I would never treat my kids or wife the way dad treated us. . . . During this time I had my own share of booze and drugs, and I fell on my face many times. I felt I just had to try out this thing that had such a strong hold on

my dad. It never did me any good, only brought more hurt and destruction into my life so I quit.

Each story has its own being. Each client brings to realization how ineffective silence is when it comes to the healing process, how important it is to communicate with each member of the household and how ignorant we are of our own behaviors as we continue to pass them down from one generation to the next. There is a sense of wanting to identify with and understand personal behaviors with what happened in previous generations. A sense of wanting to understand the kind of being they have become and how to undo what has been done to them. Some of the clients blame the residential schools for the way things are today. To them the residential schools have taken everything from them including their right to proper parenting skills, skills they needed to pass onto their own children. Parents from previous generations not only lost their parenting skills in the boarding school system but they also lost their language and family structural awareness which I believe is essential in carrying out valuable teachings. Both counselors and participants indicate that Boarding schools have done nothing but create chaos and turmoil for the First Nations people. Today communication between many family members is almost non-existent and what there is, is limited and done in very negative ways. Participants indicate they have seen loved ones open up and communicate only when they have alcohol within their system. It is only through alcohol they feel brave enough to face what is hidden within themselves, otherwise they keep the silence. It is through this type of behavior children learn to suppress their feelings, they learn to be tough, they learn not to trust, and they soon learn to behave exactly like the parent. Parents on the other hand, tend not to realize

what is happening because they too, learned behaviors from their parents and thus the cycle repeats itself.

Despite all the negativity within one's up-bringing it is important to remember that change can and does happen. Recognizing painful experiences and knowing that you do not want this for your own children is a positive step for a brighter future. Running from the situation does not bring healing only added turmoil. This then is one step to breaking the cycle. Recognition and healing begins to takes place for Sarah as she talks about positive parenting and communication within her own family as opposed to her own up-bringing. She has this to say:

> Mom and dad had no parenting skills because they did not have parenting skills passed on to them. . . . In boarding school children were sexually or physically abused either by priests, nuns, or older boys and girls. Mom never said anything about things like this, but we heard others tell their stories. She remembers her brothers being hungry and she would sneak food to them. . . . Dad never taught us Cree, because he did not want the same thing to happen to us that happened to him. . . . I am trying to understand why I drank because I never seen it at home. . . . [but] we never learned to talk about our feelings and we kept them in all the time, which is not healthy. Alcohol, I guess was a way to cope with my feelings. Feelings that I know are part of being human and are healthy no matter if they are sad, hurt, anger, etc., but before I was always pretending to be happy. . . . I love my parents dearly. . . . We talk more about our feelings now that we are grown up. The cycle has to be broken. Communication is very important for a family. . . . Maybe

> things could have been different for me if mom and dad didn't work so hard and had more time with us. If they had parenting skills passed down to them. If mom hadn't attended boarding school. If dad hadn't been given away. If we learned to express our feelings instead of keeping them inside. Each of us has been affected in one way or another. . . . I hope that by talking to my girls I could change the cycle of the above happening to them. It's hard to talk to your own children . . . but I am trying to change and educate in all areas of their lives. . . . I tell them that Granny never talked to us about these things. No matter what's in your past it always comes back if you haven't dealt with it.

As a counselor, Simone has a lot to say about parenting and residential schooling. To her the past has made her into what she is today. She uses her past experiences in her work as she helps people learn to recognize who they are as individuals. She uses the negativity that was in her life as a positive building block to help others. Her past has given her strength, as our pasts can give us strength if we recognize and allow it to do so. We must allow the journey from our head to our heart to begin if we want to heal ourselves of the past. Once we begin to feel then we begin to heal and the road to recovery begins, thus breaking the cycle of abuse. Here is her story of parenting and residential schooling:

> . . . parents raise their children the way they were raised, again back to the learned behaviors and this is passed down from generation to generation. Parents don't know how to parent. Nobody parents anymore. Nobody teaches young girls how to be mothers and that mothering is a valued gift given to us by God. Young men are not taught how to be

fathers and are not taught to respect themselves and the women in our communities. The man in our culture is supposed to be the caregiver the nurturer, he is supposed to protect and not abuse those in his life. The women are gift givers and are to be highly respected, but this is not the way it is in our communities today. . . . boarding schools have taken everything from our people. Children taken off to boarding school were not taught how to parent. All you got was discipline, strictness, do things this way, and always being put down because you were Indian. Because of this you got angrier and angrier. This then, is the anger that is passed down through the generations and it is still this way today. Also you went through racism and this has a lot to do with the way you parent. I could see how it controlled me and the effect it had on my life because when I was in boarding school, I learned how to hate. When I was very young, I was taken away to boarding school and no one prepared me for what was going to happen to me once I got there. . . . when we got to this strange place we were taken into a big building, and all herded into the showers where we were deloused and scrubbed until we were raw. We stood there wondering what the hell was happening to us, . . . you don't understand, . . . you are scared, . . . you feel abandoned, . . . you go through much. . . . You are lonely, . . . you are sad and you wonder why no one loved you. . . . I was also the only Indian in an all white class. I got called down and teased everyday of my life. I quickly learned to be a fighter, I learned to hate white people, and I learned to be a very angry person, . . . so when I left I really didn't care much for anyone. I was full of hate and anger. . . . I never wanted alcohol in my life but it just happened. . . . I couldn't handle the abuse and drinking was the only way I was able to cope and keep my sanity. This then is the kind of behaviors

> that I passed down to my children, but they are behaviors that were also passed down to me from my parents and grandparents and those at the boarding schools. . . . The toughness, the anger, the pain, I see these same behaviors in my children as they raise their own, but now we are working together to break that cycle, so that my grandchildren do not have to carry it on.

Despite all the negativity within Simone's up-bringing, she manages to recognize the pain of her experiences and do something to better the situation for herself, her children, and her grandchildren. Recognizing and developing a perspective on her past helped her to rejuvenate the negativity she learned into positive inspirational behaviors for the future of her children and grandchildren.

Healing oneself is a process each of us journey through in different ways. The participants spoke openly of healing with spiritual help. Many indicated they were unable to heal on their own and each looked to a Higher Power than their own for guidance and strength. This section I labeled 'Healing Within - Spiritual Help' because I feel it takes a Greater Power than our own to carry us through the difficult times in our lives.

Healing Within - Spiritual Help

Another interesting finding which emerges throughout this study is that of spiritual healing. Each participant, parents and counselors at some point in their healing process, sought strength from a Higher Power often referred to as God or Creator. The participants recognize that sharing brings healing, but in order to share the turmoil within themselves they needed spiritual guidance from a power greater than their own. Sharing one's inner thoughts with others and dealing with the feelings that lie within our being brings a release that restores

and strengthens who we are. The struggles we encountered because of alcohol becomes easier when we realize we are not alone. One must live one day at a time to get through the pains and hurts caused by alcohol. Adults appear to benefit from spiritual help as they begin to take ownership of the behaviors they passed on to their children and grandchildren. Here are the participants' versions of their own spiritual guidance towards healing:

> I promised when I got married my life would be different for my own wife and children. I've seen a lot of pain and hurt in my life so I made a conscious decision to make a life change and I did. With the love and help from the Creator I am doing it day by day (Kevin).

> I am in a relationship that had a rocky start. His lifestyle is an alcoholic one as well. I don't know why I am drawn to these kinds of guys, . . . [but] we care a lot for each other. . . . We feel . . . we can overcome just about any obstacle that may come up. I feel I need to leave it in God's hands for it is only God that can make things right between two people (Penny).

Joan has this to say in remembrance of almost losing a brother:

> Alcohol almost killed my baby brother along with the driver of another car. Now, I must come to terms with it and fight back for him and my family and my sons and daughters to come. We have come to believe that God has spared his life to be a living testimony to other young people who abuse alcohol. He knows what alcohol has done to him and he cannot go back to what he was. . . . he has gone through his ups and downs and he accepts life as it comes. He enjoys life too much to give it up.

Sarah, in her healing process points out the darkness alcohol brings to life and how she has never noticed the dark side before. To her the darkness represents the evils of alcohol in one's life and how it destroys the beauty of life itself. Here is what she has to say:

> One time I went to sit in the bar with my friends. . . . I asked her why the pub was so dark, the music so loud, and why it stunk? She laughed and said, " Don't you remember, it was always like this." I said, "No, I never noticed before." . . . as I worked on myself . . . I learned to ask my Higher Power for help as I understood Him. We attended church when we were small and dad talked to us about the Bible, so I did not have a hard time finding a Higher Power. I had to ask for help in everything. . . . I still went out with my friends on week-ends. . . . I thought I should drink, but I didn't want to. One time I went outside, sat in the car, kneeled down and said, Dear God, I need your help. I do not want to drink, but I cannot do it by myself. Then something wonderful happened, the craving and the urge to drink just left me. . . . This was the last time I went into the pub. . . . I had to change my old habits. . . . I learned to be grateful and not take things for granted. I . . . had to work for my sobriety. It just doesn't come by praying. I had to do my part too.

Ben in his struggles to overcome alcohol indicates it takes time to heal. It is a long arduous process. Those in the healing process must be shown a lot of love, kindness and compassion in order to help them deal with their inner broken spirits. It is good to remember you are important, and the behaviors you are dealing with are not really your own, they are learned from those previous to

you. Support from others is important, but it is you who must make the choice to heal. Here is what Ben has to say:

> I reached out and grasped unto my crutch (alcohol). Alcohol . . . was prominent in my life. . . . I began to use alcohol to help me face my problems. . . . At this point my wife left me . . . and I truly believe this was a turning point in our lives. My wife changed her life . . . . I began to think hard about myself and where I stood in my walk with God and I found it was a walk that held no value to life. . . . In 1989, . . . I too, became a Christian . . . I remember as I knelt at the alter of prayer, God dealt with my alcoholism in a more complete way. . . . as I poured out my inner being unto the Lord, He delivered me completely. Any cravings I had up to this point in my life were completely taken away and were totally obliterated from my mind. We all need a renewing in our lives, . . . We all need a Higher Power and for me God is that higher power. God has completely healed me and brought my family very close once again.

Healing is not an easy road to journey. As indicated previously, healing takes time and is often a long lonely journey. This last section I labeled 'Loneliness & Healing'. Healing just doesn't happen on its own, you must work through all your inner pain. It is something you must recognize and want for yourself. It takes a lot of forgiving, meditating, crying, and understanding of what you are going through. Healing is a lonely process. Many times you feel alone because everyone you used to know turns away from you, but as the participants indicate, healing comes when you begin to share what is in your heart and not only what is in your head.

Loneliness & Healing

In addition to the other findings, one can easily see the healing process as being a long, lonely one. People have fought a long hard battle as they came to terms with the alcohol in their lives. Some have found strength from the Bible and changing their life patterns to include the values taught within. Others have to turn to other means of healing such as the traditional ways of our people. It is important to understand that each individual must find his or her own path to recovery. Healing itself does not end once it begins. It is continuous and it unmasks many hidden behaviors within a person's life, behaviors that many of us would rather keep hidden. Participants, both parents and counselors have found that others judge you for being different and being different has no place in a community where everyone is the same. As one counselor states:

> They [people] judge, but have no idea what is happening in your life. . . . people go into the world wearing all kinds of wonderful masks. You laugh, joke, have a good time, but behind closed doors the horrors begin again. . . . Many of our communities are in denial. People live in a taboo world where they do not want to talk about their abuses. It brings too much shame and pain to everyone and thus it is brushed under the rug. . . . Children are the ones paying the price. It is them who are being hurt the most. . . . children who act out are really calling out for help. Authorities do not know how to deal with these behaviors, so what do they do? They yell at the kid, throw them out of school, label them, etc.. This is not a healing process and it does not help the child who has learned behaviors from previous generations. . . . I believe that children should be encouraged, praised, and empowered for whatever little thing

> they do. This brings a positive outlook into broken lives. . . . everyone walks an even path, a path set for success and healing. I always see people looking for the negative things in others and they never see the good or positive things within another persons' life and this I believe is where our society is falling apart. . . . Instead of focusing on the negative, we must begin to focus on the positive. We must change our attitude, even towards ourselves. We must begin to see the good in all human beings and not just the bad or negative. . . . This then takes time, patience, encouragement, unconditional love, and a willingness to want this kind of change. . . . It is hard to watch your children's behavioral patterns. Seeing them model your old behaviors with their children really hurts because you know they have been passed down from you. Breaking this cycle is not easy, it takes a lot of time and patience, caring and loving, sharing, feeling and crying together in order to get through.

To the one reading this paper, it is easy to judge by what you can see. First Nations People have lived broken lives for many years, and as you listen to the spoken word of those so brave, there is something of value to be learned. First, look deep into the hearts and the eyes of those you are judging and you will see the hurt, the pain, and the turmoil alcohol has caused within. Ask yourself, "Do I have the right to be judge and juror?"

It becomes apparent from the stories that healing just doesn't happen. One needs work through their inner pains and search their inner being to find the lost child within themselves. It takes strength to find who you are and as you begin to heal you find a peace you have never known before. You begin to see the beauty that surrounds you. You learn to love unconditionally and accept

people just the way they are. You realize others must choose the healing journey for themselves and you can only stand beside them in support. As we begin to show love, compassion, kindness, joy, gentleness, and goodness to others we soon realize it is our responsibility because many people do not understand this behavior. Simone, a counselor, has this to say about healing and the loneliness one faces in the process:

> You are going to be alone much of the time because people will not understand. You are going to walk and feel alone, but you are not alone. God is walking with you and when God walks with you, you are never alone. If you believe in what you are doing . . . make sure it happens. It doesn't matter what you go through, just think about Jesus. When Jesus walked this earth, what did people crucify Him for? They crucified Him for love, He was showing love and kindness. He was teaching and modeling love to people in many different ways. People killed Him for that. It is not any different today. People are going to try stop us from doing what is best. If we try to stop the abuses from happening, we are told not to talk about it and it is better left under the rug. If we want drugs, alcohol, and violence to stop, then we need to get to where it originates, inside each of us. We need to get to the roots . . . and peel each layer off. We need to get to the secrets because secrets are binding, they keep a person locked within themselves. . . . There are lots of secrets in our communities that stem from previous generations. We need to break through this barrier in order for healing to begin.

Clearly, one can see the intergenerational impact of alcohol on the lives of each of the clients. If things like this happen in their lives, what about our

own? Are the behaviors we claim really ours? One cannot say until we look deep within ourselves and begin the healing process others have bravely faced. With this in mind I can honestly say alcohol can appear to be stronger than love. It takes away from every part of you. It takes you away from those you love the most. It most certainly leaves you empty without feelings of your own. You carelessly lose your life because alcohol is a spirit that steals, destroys, lies, and hangs on until you make the choice of dealing with it.

Conclusion

The road to healing and recovery from alcohol was not easy for any of the participants. When one falls or hits rock bottom, they lose their sense of character, spiritual strength is drained, and moral strength and values are lost to the deviances of alcohol. The plight and experiences of the First Nations child is understandable when ones begins to look closely at the life styles of the intergenerational family. Much of the behavior displayed by the child, whether it be at home, in the school or out in the community are re-enactments of the behaviors being displayed in the home. Children often display anger and a toughness that says, "No one can hurt me anymore." This behavior is a coping mechanism. It is often the behavior role modeled in the home and many times it is also modeled in the schools without one even being aware that it's there.

As the data for this study was being assembled, it soon became apparent that many of the participants came from a background where alcohol was a prominent substance in the home and community. The desire to drink was often generated in families where alcohol had the power of control. What led the child to a need to imitate the behavioral patterns of the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins or friends? Alcohol became the means of power, the means of feeling powerful, a way of being able to deal with the problems life has to offer. Alcoholism was a key factor in much of the deprived and distorted backgrounds of each of the participants. Some talked about the loss of who they were as a person, others spoke of the loneliness they faced throughout entire adolescent lives, others spoke of the anger and rage they felt within themselves but were unable to understand why they were feeling this way until they reached out for help. Still, others talked about shouldering the responsibility of bringing up

younger brothers and sisters. Many felt psychologically drained because there was no emotional support offered to them because of the unpredictable and inconsistent parenting. Families who were inconsistent and unpredictable often displayed behaviors such as; denial - denying the rest of the family members of feelings of their own, secretive - having one or more family secrets, controlling - controlling those around them, trust - trusting only in themselves and the power of alcohol to help them through crisis, dependency - dependency on others and alcohol to get them through life situations, not taking the initiative to make decisions on their own, identification and expression - unable to identify or express positive images of who they are as individuals, not being able to deal with their inner feelings, therefore suppressing any feelings that may surface. Children in troubled families learned quickly to expect the unexpected. Participants, as well as the counselors, have indicated they have lived in chronic fear, always wondering when they would suffer their next trauma.

The participants and counselors in this study have repeatedly discussed how alcohol has proven over and over again to be the great remover of normalcy in the family system. Alcohol destroys many lives, it destroys families, it destroys whole communities, it destroys relationships, but most of all it destroys the inner child. When alcohol is in our lives we are unaware of what is happening to our children, even by those we trust the most. As alcoholics, we have a tendency to send our children off with others without realizing that we may be putting them in situations they are unable to control. This then leaves the child open to sexual abuse and other abuses that goes on behind close doors. Sexual abuse most often happens by those we trust the most, mainly, family members. This behavior then can be seen as a direct off-shoot of alcohol because the offender often has learned this behavior from the generation

previous to them. So when one deals with the alcohol and begins the road to recovery they must also deal with the underlying issues in order to heal spiritually within, otherwise the guilt stumps the healing process for them. As was said before, healing from one's past is not easy as we look at the behaviors we have learned from previous generations.

Healing just doesn't happen, it begins when we see what is happening and we desire to see a change. We must look deep within ourselves and take responsibility for the behaviors that we pass down to our children. We must stop blaming others, even though we may have learned negative behaviors from them. We must face our own self and want to change the way we are. The participants point out that it is much easier to point fingers and blame others than to face the reality within ourselves. Once we face our self, we see many unwanted behaviors and we begin to deal with them one by one. This process leaves no room for us to point fingers and look at what others are doing because we have many layers of learned behaviors to work through. It is important to note that the behaviors children learn can be unlearned quickly if it is dealt with early in their lives. If one looks beyond the behaviors of the child or adult, one can see only frightened boys and girls. The negative behaviors being displayed act as shields to protect one from further hurts. We must be all accountable for our own behaviors and learn to admit when we are wrong. We must be careful what we say, so that we don't hurt others. It is hard to live a good life because others don't understand you and many times our old behaviors try to take control. The inner peace one seeks in the healing process is not found on the outside, but is on the inside. We must look into the places we have kept hidden and silent for many years. We must find this place in order for us to begin our healing journey. For the child this process is easier than it is for the adults

because the child is only at the beginning stages of secrecy. Regardless, only you can begin and want this healing for yourself, others can be there to help by showing acts of love and kindness toward you.

With these things in mind I would like to now give five recommendations that may help the child develop enough skills to overcome and replace the negative conditioning that alcohol placed upon their lives. Regaining control and balance in one's life is not an intellectual or rational process, nor is it an easy process. The healing or recovery process is one that must take the person back to the hierarchical needs that have been quelched from the time they have been born. These hierarchical or human needs as stated by Whitfield (1987) are; survival, safety, touching, attention, mirroring or echoing, guidance, listening, being real, participating, acceptance of self and others, being able to grieve losses and grow, support, loyalty and trust, accomplishment, being able to make decisions, sexuality, enjoyment and fun, freedom, nurturing, and loving self and others unconditionally including connection with a Higher Power. The child or person in therapy is given the opportunity to get in touch with their feelings. They go through the process of pain and joy, discouragement, excitement, and a renewed strength in order to find their inner being. The following recommendations transpired from the participants' stories.

1. The first and most important recommendation is the need for communities to give greater attention to the needs of the children. Many children suffer silently and there needs to be a stronger outreach and more healing programs for the youths in First Nations communities. Existing programs are good, but they are designed to help those who are over eighteen. This leaves the younger people with no where to go for help until they reach the

appropriate age. Experiences have shown that children can be helped to adjust to life with alcoholic parents. They can be helped to resolve or handle some of the fears, conflicts, and hostilities in their lives. Children can be helped to gain a sense of trust and love for other people and to develop their self-awareness, self-esteem, and a sense of security which will enable them to continue to grow and achieve some success in life. It is also very important for children to understand their own cultural background in order to understand who they are as a people.

2. The second recommendation is the need for treatment of whole families and not for only the alcoholic. In treating the whole family, one must look at restructuring the behavioral pattern of the family. Helping each member understand the behavioral pattern of previous generations would bring forth renewed attitudes toward the healing process. Through counseling, families will be able to move towards a more meaningful life together. Opening up the lines of communication between family members is an important step which must be taken. Parents must work together to understand and learn about the roles in family life, about discipline, about the give and take among family members, about understanding and enjoying their children, and about loving one another unconditionally and accepting each other for who they are. But most of all they must learn to accept themselves and become responsible for their own behaviors.

3. The third recommendation is that we must begin to teach our young people to become responsible members of the community. We must teach them to go out and do something with their lives instead of sitting at home always feeling sorry for themselves. We need to give our young people direction that

will help them develop into responsible young people and we need to stand behind them but not suffocate or take the responsibilities away from them. Young men and women need to be taught to respect themselves and to respect the individuality of each other. Young men need to be taught how to become good husbands, fathers and providers to his family. Young women need to be taught what it is to be life givers and to respect motherhood as a valued gift,

4. The fourth recommendation is that spiritual healing is important to any programs set up to help the family. In order for families to heal one needs to attack the problem from the grass-roots level. We must remember that alcohol is only one part of the problem and there are many off-shoots because people use alcohol to cover up unwanted behaviors. Participants in this study have all stated they could not have healed on their own and that it took something greater than their own strength to help them through the healing process. Churches and the different organizations within communities need to work together to build effective programs that will help meet the needs of the children in the community. Every individual in the helping profession has an opportunity to work toward changing public attitudes towards alcoholism and emotional disturbances. It has also been stated that those in the helping field must go through the healing process themselves before they can really understand and help the alcoholic overcome. As one of the counselors states, " There are too many helpers in this world who are trying to help, but they themselves have never gone through the healing process." Helpers try to save everyone else and in the meantime they themselves are dying inside, their dreams gone out the window, they burn out, and they don't say what is bothering them. They don't share their own feelings and they don't show any emotions and yet they are out there trying to help.

5. The fifth recommendation is to help the child understand the ravages of alcohol. Listen to your children regardless of what it is they are saying. Many times the alcoholic destroys things in the home, but we always try to cover it up and hide these things from our children and from the alcoholic themselves. Face the realities of the alcoholic behavior and let the child as well as the alcoholic see the destruction that alcohol carries with it. Let the children know that you are not doing this to hurt them, but to help them understand the impact alcohol brings to life. Reality cannot be denied and to spend energy denying what is real hinders the healing process for all those involved. Let children know that you are interested in what they have to say about the situation. You may not accept or agree with what they are saying, but at least the child knows that you are listening.

Although I have given five recommendations there are many other factors that must be taken into account as we work with the alcoholic and their families. Recommendations given by participants show that First Nations People need family healing. Many of the behaviors and hurts passed down for generations need to be broken. Children need to take responsibility for their own behaviors and not blame others. Young people need to be given direction and it is the responsibility of the older people of the communities to teach the young people. It is important for communities to give greater attention to the needs of children, to help children make choices that lead to better lifestyles. It is important for parents to listen to what the child is saying to them. Many times we fail to listen until it is too late. Spiritual healing is an important step in the healing process. Information from participants have shown they needed a greater strength than their own to help them overcome the ravages of alcohol. Another important factor is the change from what one sees as being "normal" to the realization of

alcohol being "abnormal". It takes much courage and strength for one to talk about this issue in their lives and I truly admire the courageous abilities of each participant of this study.

It is important to remember that children suffer the most. Children learn from the adults around them and sometimes the seeds we sow are not healthy ones therefore the child must break from this cycle later in life. I would like to end with the following poem:

Children Live What They Learn

If a child lives with criticism,
He learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame,
he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice.
If a child lives with security,

He learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval,

He learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,

He learns to find love in the world.

Author unknown

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix A1

March 6, 1997

Superintendent
_____ School Board
Box 190
_____, Manitoba

Dear Superintendent,

I am currently working on my dissertation which is the final project to complete my Masters Degree. The area of my study is titled, Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol on Children. My study is qualitative in nature and requires insight into one's feelings and attitudes. The process requires collecting personal stories and confidential interviews.

This is to ask for permission to have access to go into the school to begin the collection of stories and interviews. All information is confidential, participants names will not be used and the participant may withdraw at anytime throughout the study. Identifying information will not be included at any time. Findings are based on grouped findings, rather than individual findings. All taped stories, fieldnotes, and materials will be returned to the participants or destroyed at completion of this study.

By doing such a study, my hope is to gain a deeper understanding of children and their life experiences with alcohol. Recommendations given will go beyond mere survival. As you are aware, substance abuse is rampant in our Native communities. Young people tend to turn to alcohol as a means of escape from reality and nothing seems to be done to help them deal with this deviancy. By doing this study, I hope to find answers that will result in providing culturally specific programs and Healing Circles for the youths. Our children are our future and we must begin to give them hope by showing we care about the struggles they encounter in life. A written summary of this study will be granted at your request.

Please let me know as soon as possible by letter if I have permission to do this study.

Thank-you for your support.

Yours Sincerely,

Kandy McCorrister

cc/ Administrators
School Board Members

APPENDICES

Appendix A2

March 6, 1997

Principal
_____ _____ School
Box 670
_____, Manitoba

Dear Principal,

I am currently working on my dissertation which is the final project to complete my Masters Degree. The working title of my study is: Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol Abuse on Children. My study is qualitative in nature and requires insight into one's feelings and attitude. This process requires collecting personal stories and confidential interviews.

This letter is to confirm our verbal discussion in regards to having access to students in grades 3, 6, 9, & 12. I am requesting written permission to begin the study in the school. All information is confidential, participants names will not be used, identifying information will not be included and the client may withdraw at anytime throughout the study. Findings are to be based on group findings rather than individual findings. All taped stories and field notes will be returned to the participants or destroyed at completion of this study.

As you are aware, substance abuse is rampant in our Native communities. Young people tend to turn to alcohol as a means of escape from reality and nothing seems to be done to help them deal with this deviancy. By doing this study, I hope to find answers that will result in providing culturally relevant programs and Healing Circles for the youths. Our children are our future and we must begin to give them hope by showing we care about the struggles they encounter in life. A written summary of this study will be granted at your request.

Thank-you for your support in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Kandy McCorrister

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Appendix B1

March 6, 1997

55 Elviss Cresent
Brandon, Manitoba
R7B 2K8

Dear Parents, Guardians, Grandparents;

Hi! My name is Kandy McCorrister. I am a student at Brandon University. I am currently working on my dissertation, which is the final project to complete my Masters Degree. The title of my study is; Intergenerational Impact of Alcohol Abuse on Children.

We as parents become exasperated as we see our children turn to alcohol as a means of escape from reality. The question I ask is, "What can we do to help them overcome this problem?"

I am asking your help in this study by inviting you and your child(ren) to take part. Any information collected from you and your child(ren) is held in strict confidentiality, with only myself and my advisor having access to it. No names will be used in this study, only age and gender. Our children, yours and mine, are suffering silently and we need to start helping them. By doing this study, I hope to find answers that will result in providing culturally specific programs for the youths. Our children are our future and we must begin to give them hope by showing we care about the struggles they encounter in life.

This study requires collecting personal stories, either written or taped, along with a confidential interview. Again all information is confidential. The story deals with your personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with alcohol, either as a child or an adult.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you would like to be a participant in this study. I have included a self addressed envelope along with a permission slip. I can also be reached at 726-3462 (collect) if you have any questions concerning this study. If you do not want to take part, kindly return the form unmarked. You also have the option of pulling yourself out of the study anytime you wish.

Thank you for your cooperation and I am looking forward to working with you as we struggle to find ways to help our young people.

Yours Sincerely,

Kandy McCorrister

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APPENDICES

Appendix B2

Permission Sheet

Names: Mother: _____ Age: _____

Father: _____ Age: _____

Children: _____ Age: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Please check one or more of the following items.

____ Yes, We would like to take part in this study, we understand all information we give is confidential and will be destroyed on completion of this study.

____ Yes, our child(ren) have permission to take part of this study. All information he/she may give is confidential and will be destroyed on completion of this study.

____ No, we do not want to take part in this study.

____ No, I do not want my child(ren) to take part in this study.

____ Yes, I would like to take part in the study, but not my child(ren).

____ Yes, I would like my child(ren) to take part, but not myself.

APPENDICES

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

A strong desire to drink among young people of alcoholics is often generated by families where the alcoholic has power of control. This then, leads to a greater need to imitate and identify with the behavioral patterns of the parents by the child and the adolescent. Because of these processes, children and adolescents learn to depend on alcohol as a means of feeling powerful. Below is a list of subsidiary questions directly related to this study. Please answer each question as best as you can.

1. What are the relationship behavioral patterns of the alcoholic from one generation to the next? Does this change over time? How?

2. Does the relationship within the family structuring system change in regards to alcohol being passed down from one generation to the next?

3. Healing from within or Spiritual Healing. Is it important and relevant to those dealing with alcohol abuse? Should it be recognized as part of the healing process?

4. How do you think children affected by alcohol see themselves in a society that continuously lives a double standard in regards to alcoholic intake?

5. There are many things associated with alcohol use. Is it important for one to deal with the underlying causes or roots of the problem in order to be successful in overcoming the abuse?

6. What would you like to see happen in regards to helping First Nation Children overcome alcohol and drug abuse?

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Appendices

Appendix D

Behavioral Patterning for Family Healing

Parents

Mother	Father
- shows no emotions	- verbal attack on family
- low self-esteem	- damages property
- denial of negative behaviors	- acts of jealously
- lying to hide / cover up behaviors	- ridicules others
- low frustration level	- beats & blames family
- feelings of isolation	- harasses
- anger	- swearing / use of foul language
- broken promises	- beats wife & children
- hitting, yelling, throwing things	- slapping, kicking, strangulation
- blames children & others for what is happening	- possessive
- dependency on others	- isolates family
- emotional towards others & self	- spies on those he loves
- deprived of love / confusion	- lies
- others	- others

Our Own Behaviors

- lying
- denial
- low self-esteem
- unable to make own decisions
- acting brave & tough in front of others
- shows no emotions
- high frustration levels
- anger
- striking out at others
- protective of parents
- hitting, swearing & putting others down
- pretending everything is okay
- use of alcohol & other drugs to forget
- loss of identity
- others

Children are shaped according to the behaviors of the parents and grandparents. Children often have no idea of who they really are. According to the child the behaviors they learn are normal. Children who see and hear negative things all the time soon learn to behave that way. Children need to belong and they quickly learn 'how', but in negative ways. This can be seen as one works through the behavioral pattern program above. As the child goes through the patterning, they begin to see the behaviors they need to change in order to achieve a positive outlook in their own lives.